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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 004653

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SUBJECT: AL-HAKIM AND AMBASSADOR REVIEW POLITICAL AND
SECURITY DEVELOPMENTS

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: SCIRI leader Abdulaziz al-Hakim told the Ambassador on December 19 that discussions on the moderate front were continuing but no agreement had been reached. He said that the IIP had raised some questions, and he also criticized the IIP for supporting a recent conference in Istanbul. After listening to the Ambassador's take on the regional situation, al-Hakim said he was "ready" to visit countries like Saudi Arabia if the opportunity arose. Al-Hakim also offered his view on the principles that should govern de-Baathification reform, which balanced compensation to victims of the Baath regime with a reasoned approach to former Baathists and their families. End summary.

¶2. (C) Al-Hakim opened the meeting by recounting in broad terms his recent trip to the US, with Mohsin al-Hakim, also present at the meeting, providing additional details about the trip. Al-Hakim was clearly enthusiastic about the breadth of interlocutors he had met and singled out his meetings with President Bush and Secretary Rice as particularly positive. He said he looked forward to further meetings to follow up on some of the issues discussed in Washington. The Ambassador said that the President and Secretary Rice were very happy with al-Hakim's trip and

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agreed with al-Hakim on the need for follow-up.

Revising the Baghdad Security Plan

¶3. (C) The Ambassador briefed al-Hakim on current thinking on a revised Baghdad security plan, noting that it should be a combined GOI-Coalition plan under the leadership of Iraqi forces that targeted all those causing insecurity and that also contained improved provisions to protect Baghdad residents. Al-Hakim agreed with the principles the Ambassador put forward, emphasizing that "we cannot accept any militias or actions outside the framework of the state." He also noted the importance of improved equipment, improved intelligence, more effective checkpoint procedures, and developing a mechanism to make use of ideas and information from "sincere elements" of the government's base of support in Baghdad.

The Moderate Front and Regional Developments

¶4. (C) The Ambassador noted the importance of positive political developments in complementing the security plan and regional diplomatic initiatives and asked al-Hakim about developments in building the moderate front. Al-Hakim said

there was "preliminary consensus" on the program, but it needed more work to be realized. The coordination mechanism, he continued, had also not been determined, with the IIP "having some questions." The group, al-Hakim said, planned "to study these issues, take decisions, and move forward."

15. (C) Al-Hakim expressed displeasure at two recent developments related to the moderate front. First, he opined that "the media regrettably caused embarrassment to some entities" by portraying the front as being established to marginalize the Sadrists. This portrayal, al-Hakim argued, was incorrect: "we want to establish a strong state, not confront a certain movement." He also criticized the IIP for sending a representative to the Conference in Support of the Iraqi People held in Istanbul the previous week and for giving its support to the conference's statement. (Note: According to one report, IIP official Ziyad al-Ani attended the conference. We do not have evidence about an official IIP statement of support. End note.) He also criticized al-Hashemi for his remarks in the US about the Iraqi government.

16. (C) The Ambassador told al-Hakim that the regional situation was not positive at this point, with Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the UAE declining to host the final compact meeting. While President Bush was ready to put more pressure on the Saudis and others to take a better stance on Iraq, the Ambassador continued, there needed to be positive action and political development in Iraq. The Ambassador noted that it might help if al-Hakim visited Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries. Al-Hakim replied with a shrug, saying he was "ready" but suggesting he did not have an invitation. The Ambassador said that the US would help.

Ministerial Changes and De-Baathification

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17. (C) The Ambassador asked al-Hakim if there was any progress on ministerial changes, perhaps involving a formula that would give the Prime Minister more flexibility in exchange for more accountability. Al-Hakim said that SCIRI supported the need to strengthen ministers and that they should not be "party-affiliated." He said that SCIRI would evaluate its ministers based on criteria including budget execution and the quality and affiliations of the deputies they appointed. The Ambassador noted that the minister's compatibility with the Prime Minister should also be a criterion. Badr leader Hadi al-Amri, who was present at the meeting, voiced his agreement, saying that the "Prime Minister and the minister's party" should be the "references" for evaluating a minister's performance.

18. (C) Prompted by the Ambassador to discuss progress on de-Baathification reform, al-Hakim noted he was not at a recent PCNS meeting where the issue was discussed but offered four principles that should govern the reform effort: 1) the goal should not be revenge; 2) "we should not deprive families of bread"; 3) consideration should be given to the pressure put on Iraqis to join the Baath party ("joining the Baath is not like joining al-Qaeda"); and, 4) offering something to the victims of the Baath regime. Al-Amri reinforced the importance of offering compensation to Baath victims "so that they don't take revenge into their own hands." Al-Amri and the Ambassador then discussed the reintegration of former Badr Corps members into the Iraqi security forces (ISF). The Ambassador noted that the Prime Minister had given him a list several months ago of approximately 900 Badr members who had been offered jobs with the police. Al-Amri countered that he was still waiting for implementation of an agreement that would bring 600 Badr officers into the ISF. The Ambassador said that he would follow up on the matter.

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